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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000484

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DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA (BGRAVES)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: SLOW ELECTION RESULTS CERTIFICATION RAISES CONCERN  
ABOUT STABILITY IN SIERRA LEONE

REF: FREETOWN 481

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas N. Hull for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (SBU) The slow process of certifying the results from the August 11 Sierra Leone presidential and parliamentary election results has election stakeholders concerned about escalating tensions threatening stability while Sierra Leoneans wait for the official announcement of the final results, which is not expected until August 23. The process has been successful to this point, and National Electoral Commission (NEC) officials are working diligently to accurately record the results as they arrive at the Tally Center in Freetown from the 6,171 polling stations. NEC Chairperson Dr. Christiana Thorpe announced August 14 that NEC had received nearly 70 percent of the tally sheets and had certified over 18 percent of the vote. She promised that the process would accelerate in the next few days as NEC officials became more proficient in recording tally sheet results.

¶2. (C) On August 14, head of the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) Victor Angelo informed the Ambassador that political party agents were slowing the results certification process even further by demanding close scrutiny of the local tally sheets at the NEC Tally Center. The Ambassador shared with Angelo his concern that the longer the certification process takes, the more opportunity there is for mischief by political parties. The Ambassador encouraged Angelo to urge the NEC to expedite the process as much as possible.

¶3. (C) On August 14, Emboffs received uncorroborated intelligence from sources that the SLPP leadership had held a meeting at Vice President Solomon Berewa's residence on August 12 to discuss a strategy to disrupt the electoral process if it appeared the party was losing at the polls. Former National Provisional Revolutionary Council (NPRC) leaders Julius Maade Bio and recent U.S. deportee Tom Nyuma were reportedly present at the meeting. The SLPP allegedly is very upset with the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) for its impartiality and blames it for the SLPP's poor showing at the polls. Current certified partial results of slightly over 18 percent of the tally show the SLPP trailing the All People's Congress (APC) by a significant margin.

¶4. (C) According to these uncorroborated sources, the SLPP is planning attacks on the SLP Headquarters and on a separate police station where the Local Unit Commander (LUC) arrested SLPP party supporters for interference on election day. The SLPP also allegedly has assembled a group of approximately 120 youth who are stationed at SLPP Headquarters and will act as a rapid response force to protect SLPP supporters and cause disturbances. Sources says the youth are armed with clubs with nails, acid, and possibly old AK-47s. Some political observers feel that, in the event of civil unrest,

the current SLPP government would step in, declare a state of emergency, and suspend the electoral process, allowing them to continue in power. Whether they would have the support of the police and the military, however, remains uncertain.

15. (C) According to news reports, the SLPP is setting up a new radio station on 94.8 FM, Radio Unity, to offset the APC radio (88.8 FM), which, shortly following the closure of polls on August 11, broadcasted an appeal to supporters to come out and guard ballot boxes and the counting process. APC youth responded and mounted barricades in major access roads in some parts of eastern and central Freetown. Police were later able to disperse the youth. UNIOSIL officials met with APC presidential candidate Ernest Koroma late on August 11 to appeal for restraint on the part of his party supporters and radio station.

16. (SBU) A combination of appeals for calm from the UN, international observers, and outgoing President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah appear to have currently reduced the level of inflammatory rhetoric; however, tensions beneath the surface remain a concern. Many of the details of the SLPP plans were later reported in the local newspaper, The Standard Times. The media also announced that the Independent Media Commission, which usually takes months to approve a new radio license, issued the SLPP a license within a day for their station.

17. (C) The Ambassador met with British High Commissioner Sara MacIntosh on August 15 who requested an emergency appointment to discuss the latest reports of SLPP plans to disrupt the electoral process. During the meeting, possible scenarios were discussed on how the situation might play out. Essentially, however, any attempt to disrupt the process in

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Freetown will certainly incite large crowds of angry, pro-APC youth.

18. (C) The international community is continuing efforts to diffuse tensions. On August 15, a delegation of the resident diplomatic corps in Sierra Leone, represented by the EC Head, the Ghanaian High Commission, and the Egyptian Ambassador, met with the heads of the three top political parties (APC, SLPP, and PMDC) to present a joint statement which post supported, urging patience and calm as the NEC completes the tallying process. The Ambassador will have a farewell call on President Kabbah on August 16 and will underscore our concern for threats to the democracy, which is the legacy of his 11 years in office.

19. (C) COMMENT: Despite the smooth functioning of voting on August 11, the slow certification process is of increasing concern as it gives political parties time to release their unofficial results, to which party supporters will certainly react. The APC's strong showing in the Western Area and in the Northern Province has boosted the APC's confidence that it can win the presidential election. In addition, although results are still arriving at the NEC Tally Center, the likelihood of the APC winning the most seats in Parliament is widely expected. As the APC's confidence grows, so does the SLPP's desperation, which makes the reports of SLPP plans to disrupt the process, albeit uncorroborated, cause for concern. END COMMENT.

HULL